

# Introduction

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The question behind this book concerns the link between empathy, the history discipline, the philosophy of history and history education. It surfaced a decade ago while I was being instructed in the method of teaching school history. A seminar on the concept of ‘historical empathy’ left me flummoxed. I knew that if history was to concern itself with the forms of meaning produced by human societies in the past, it must penetrate to the place where these meanings were held and expressed. I knew that history was a perspectival form of inquiry. But alongside concepts such as ‘cause and consequence’ and ‘continuity and change’, it was unclear to me how a concept typically described metaphorically as ‘putting oneself in another’s shoes’ was meant to work. What combination of empathy’s poetic, aesthetic, cognitive, imaginative and affective qualities were we teachers-in-training expected to go forth and instil?

The concept’s variety of meanings methodologically had furnished it with a full range of political implications. Empathy as emotional engagement could appeal to those who endowed the past with an activist potential to change the present. Empathy as imaginative exploration suggested the possibility of freeing history from evidentiary limitations and entering more fully into the experiences of everyday and marginalized people. A more poetic and aesthetic conception seemed to promise a history as wonder divested of worldly entanglements. Construed cognitively as an investigation of historical context, empathy enticed social and liberal democrats hoping to raise appreciation of the plurality of human forms of life in time and space. But some could regard even this seemingly noble ideal as imposing Western categories of historical thinking on societies possessing their own historical cultures and modes of historical representation. At the opposite end of the political spectrum, conservatives could complain that empathy cheated history of its

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time-honoured role in buttressing national attachments and commitment to universal precepts serving as a guide to the future. Empathy struck at the heart of what it meant to do history as a political enterprise.

Since it was launched in England in the early 1970s, history educationalists have tended to answer that empathy is a cognitive act that in some way defines or constitutes historical method.<sup>1</sup> ‘Empathy is central to history – one might say structural’, wrote one of these educationalists, Peter Lee, in 1983, ‘in that without it . . . history cannot begin.’<sup>2</sup> Lee argued that unless historians understand the points of view of the people whose lives they study, there can be no prospect of using historical evidence in a way that explains why they acted the way they did. In the history classroom, teachers and students were to explain the past by reference to the beliefs, values and goals of the people who lived, thought and acted in it. Empathy became the most common term employed by teachers and examiners to characterize a form of historical thinking that yielded an enriched understanding of historical context.

Yet there was no agreement on what empathy meant. Some suggested that empathy was an ‘achievement’ of having reconstructed the connections between a historical agent’s intentions, circumstances and actions. Others saw it as a history-specific instructional ‘process’ used to illuminate the ‘indeterminate area of action’ between the context in which the action was taken and its consequence.<sup>3</sup> Selecting empathy from a list that included alternatives such as ‘rational understanding’, ‘understanding’ and ‘perspective taking’, history educationalists linked it with the idea that an understanding of the context in which an action was taken is the basis for explaining why it was taken. They recognized that empathy carried a wider range of meanings in its everyday sense, but were confident that it could be given this meaning in its historical sense.

But for a concept supposedly so central to historical method, empathy was noticeably absent from historians’ writings on the historical craft. E.H. Carr believed that historical facts were more than simply given to historians, but this did not imply that to know the facts required historians to establish a kind of contact with the persons attached to them. G.R. Elton maintained that there were only two principles of historical research – to continually ask ‘exactly what evidence is there, and exactly what does it mean?’ Rather than merely ‘hear’ what people in the past were saying, historians had to penetrate the past with questions that kept them alert to the variety of possible meanings contained in historical sources. George Kitson Clark acknowledged the difficulty of explaining the past through general categories and suggested that nominalism – the medieval doctrine that no universal or abstract categories exist, only individuals – was a ‘healthy dissolvent’ that encouraged historians to identify their distinct parts.<sup>4</sup>

Empathy was not the active ingredient in any of these prescriptions. Across the Atlantic, Peter Gay issued a more pronounced call. His investigation of style in historical writing led him to conclude that the ‘emotional empathy that is irrelevant to other scientists is a quality he must patiently cultivate’. Like the modern psychoanalyst, Gay’s historian worked in the ‘tense yet productive coexistence of engagement and detachment’; he must ‘penetrate the most secret recesses of his patient’s life’, yet remain, as Freud put it, ‘a stranger to his patient forever’.<sup>5</sup>

Philosophers of history offered a more crystalline picture of empathy’s place in historical method. Carl G. Hempel, the German philosopher of science whose 1942 essay ‘The Function of General Laws in History’ provided a set of problems and thus a research programme for a scholarly field long the stronghold of speculative philosophers in the German, Italian and British idealist traditions, wrote that the ‘method of empathy’ functioned as a ‘heuristic device’ for suggesting ‘certain psychological hypotheses’ that might serve the historian as ‘explanatory principles in the case under consideration’, but in the end did not constitute a historical explanation. ‘In history as anywhere else in empirical science’, he argued famously, ‘the explanation of a phenomenon consists in subsuming it under general empirical laws . . . the criterion of its soundness is not whether it appeals to our imagination.’<sup>6</sup>

William Dray, the Canadian philosopher of history, described Hempel as propounding the ‘covering-law model’ of historical explanation and countered it by proposing a theory of empathetic understanding as ‘rational explanation’ in his 1957 book *Laws and Explanation in History*. The idealist notion of empathy or imaginative understanding ‘allowed some merit’, in his view, when it was used as a method for displaying the rationale of what was done in the past.<sup>7</sup> Historians achieved understanding when they saw the ‘reasonableness’ of what a man did, given the situation as he perceived it, and they provided a rational explanation when the connection between his beliefs, motives and actions was established. Dray denied explicitly that this entailed anything more than empirical, evidence-based inquiry: ‘To get inside Disraeli’s shoes the historian does not simply ask himself: “What would I have done?”; he reads Disraeli’s dispatches, his letters, his speeches, &c. – and not with the purpose of discovering antecedent conditions falling under some empirically validated law, but rather in the hope of appreciating the problem as Disraeli saw it.’<sup>8</sup>

The covering law-versus-empathy debate provided a lens through which the history of historical thought could be read by the 1960s, when a body of publications in historiography and the philosophy of history became available for undergraduate and graduate study, among them Fritz Stern’s *Varieties of History* (1956), Hans Meyerhoff’s *Philosophy of History in Our Time* (1959) and Patrick Gardiner’s *Theories of History* (1959).

Gathering pace at the same time were educational theories that treated the subjects studied at school as an induction into distinct forms of knowledge. Spurred by these, history educationalists in England turned to the philosophy of history to establish the subject's conceptual structure. There they found a philosophy of history that had come into existence precisely to defend history's autonomy against Hempel's methodological incursion. From the early 1950s, analytical philosophers of history denied the applicability of the covering-law model to history while using it as a platform for advancing their claims about the *sui generis* character of historical explanation. A peculiar dynamic emerged: these philosophers mostly rejected the model of scientific explanation, deeming it a form of methodological determinism, while meeting the challenge it posed by attempting to shore up with analytical rigour older varieties of humanism and metaphysics, which as predominantly liberal thinkers they had viewed as a hotbed of imprecise thinking and communist politics.<sup>9</sup> Dray's chief complaint against the covering-law doctrine in history was not the difficulty of putting it into practice; rather, it was that it established 'a kind of *conceptual barrier* to a humanistically oriented historiography'.<sup>10</sup>

Specifically, the analytical philosophers of history refurbished R.G. Collingwood's view that 'all history is the history of thought' along largely epistemological lines to provide an account of historical knowledge that avoided his claim – difficult to accept in the new paradigm – that there was no real boundary between epistemology and metaphysics. Collingwood was regarded as having announced a 'rationalist' or 'intentionalist' approach to explaining human actions from the inside, from the standpoint of what agents held in mind while going about the actions that furnish history with its subject matter. In this way, he became associated with empathy's longer history as a method for capturing the individuality of historical phenomena.

Within this intellectual framework, Collingwood was looked upon by history educationalists as proposing a more accessible way of teaching history now that the English school had to appeal to students of varied academic ability. By holding in mind the thought behind past actions, students could attribute the meaning of a past action to a specific historical context and at the same time consider that meaning in relation to their present-day lives. In their quest for the subject's conceptual basis, these educationalists saw historians doing what history students traditionally had not done. They penetrated behind appearances and achieved insight into historical situations; they revived, re-enacted, re-thought and re-experienced the hopes, fears, plans, desires, views and intentions of those they sought to understand.<sup>11</sup> Empathy was laid as the cornerstone of a structure of historical inquiry designed to have students achieve this task.

This disciplinary conception of empathy has sat uncomfortably with some who see it as limiting empathy's potential to contribute to a fuller his-

torical experience in history classrooms. A brief glance at the literature justifies their concerns. Bridget Cooper has suggested that in education generally, empathy 'is not a neat, concrete concept which necessarily permits high objective evaluation, but its complexity must be understood in as many diverse ways as possible because of its centrality to human interaction and to teaching and learning'. The authors of a 1985 study in developmental psychology began by quoting sixteen definitions of the concept before announcing their intention to account for its 'affective-cognitive-communicative features'. An edited volume noted shortly thereafter that even among the different specialisms in psychology – clinical, development and social – there were conflicting views on how the concept should be defined. A recent collection assembling scholars from philosophical and psychological backgrounds further demonstrates empathy's elasticity, with sections devoted to 'empathy and mind', 'empathy and aesthetics' and 'empathy and morality'. Contributors take insights from phenomenology, hermeneutics, clinical psychology, developmental and social psychology, care ethics, neuroscience and ethology to defend and extend the concept, while others caution that empathy can be detrimental to human affairs.<sup>12</sup> Added to this scholarly interest are the host of books available on the popular market, *Zero Degrees of Empathy*, *The Age of Empathy*, *The Art of Empathy*, *The Empathy Factor*, *Roots of Empathy* and many more. Indeed, when Barack Obama declared that America's federal deficit was less of a problem than its 'empathy deficit', we could be sure that empathy was being vigorously discussed.<sup>13</sup>

The disciplinary conception has been regarded as unsatisfactory by educationalists writing from the American social studies tradition of history teaching. Keith Barton and Linda Levstik argue that restricting the concept to a cognitive endeavour limits the contribution it might make to pluralist democracy. 'To engage in meaningful deliberation with those whose ideas differ from our own', they write, 'we must do more than understand them – we must care about them and about their perspectives.' Christopher Blake contends that the disciplinary conception is 'essentially a reductionist one' that presumes 'a false distinctiveness of historical inquiry'. According to him, empathy's integrative and holistic nature 'unites it more widely and diversely than any one discipline can circumscribe'. Jason Endacott has conducted empirical research beginning with the proposition that 'we must first experience affective empathetic arousal' of the historical agents under investigation. The most important task for history educators is therefore to find out how to cultivate 'empathetic engagement' rather than ask what constitutes empathetic understanding.<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, Deborah Cunningham finds little in the literature that could help teachers understand how the variety of factors specific to their classroom environments work with or against their efforts to cultivate empathy in their students.<sup>15</sup>

It is fair to characterize North American history teaching as more politically and socially oriented than its British counterpart. I say North American history teaching – and not simply US history teaching – because the internationally influential Canadian model of historical thinking also stresses the benefits of historical learning for social democracy. Peter Seixas has acknowledged his debt to the British educationalists whose work on disciplinary concepts informed his framework while observing that he introduced an ‘ethical dimension’ and emphasized the value of historical thinking for democratic education. The British educationalists behind empathy’s formulation as a central structural concept held to a more open-ended ideal of history as a truly liberal education. They believed that a conceptual structure for teaching history emerged from properties internal to history itself, from its distinct logic as a form of knowledge – a belief enabled, as we shall see, by history’s roots in idealist philosophy.

The philosophy of history played a less important role in shaping US history education practice, though a joint effort by historians since 2011 to agree upon the skills, knowledge and habits of mind students develop in university history degrees suggests an increasing tendency to define empathy in the language of historical method.<sup>16</sup> The first document of the American Historical Association’s ‘Tuning Project’ to articulate history’s disciplinary core bore witness to the full variety of meanings admitted by the concept’s application to historical study. The ‘practice of historical empathy’ assumed the second of six core competencies of a university history education, which required the achievement of six learning outcomes. Students valued history’s contribution to lifelong learning and the critical habits of mind essential for effective and engaged citizenship; they developed historical knowledge with range and depth; they appreciated the provisional status of historical knowledge; they contextualized the past in its own terms; they explored different historical and theoretical viewpoints providing perspective on the past; and they recognized their location in history.

A revised version released three years later winnowed out those aspects not concerned with the investigation of historical context and brought the view of US historians more firmly into line with the longer tradition of approaching the concept explored in this book. Empathy was no longer a core competency to be realized through a collection of learning outcomes; the collaborative ‘tuning’ of a common disciplinary language reeled it back to a learning outcome of a core competency in ‘developing historical methods’. It went from being its own competency, with six outcomes acting in its service, to being one of four outcomes required for the achievement of a competency. Students receiving a training in historical method were now to ‘develop empathy toward people in the context of their distinctive historical moments’, even if earlier in the document they were told that history ‘re-

quires empathy for historical actors'. On the one hand, history's disciplinary profile gave an impression that students were to have empathy for past actors in their persons; on the other hand, dressed in the language of historical method, empathy directed inquiry to the conditions that led them to think, believe and act in the ways they did. The latter complemented three other outcomes in appreciating the evidentiary nature of historical accounts, being able to work with complex materials and practising ethical standards in the use and acknowledgement of historical and scholarly sources.

It may be perfectly reasonable to take the view prevalent in psychology and everyday usage that empathy is feeling what another person feels, but such a communion with dead people is a hard task. History students do not have the benefit of being able to confer with their subjects and so cannot 'catch' their feelings. They are obliged to take a second view that empathy involves the cognitive act of attributing a context to another person's behaviour in order to make sense of it. History involves reading historical texts. Empathy in history cannot operate on a basis of emotional contagion, nor do questions regarding empathetic relationships between teachers and students – though they are indeed important educational questions in social development – help with the methodological issue of understanding the dearly departed through the texts they left for us to interpret.

Aspects of the so-called dark side of empathy are relevant here. Fritz Breithaupt warns that 'empathy is not a sugarcoated method of happy community building' – it can arouse negative feelings towards others and put the feelings it captures in others to negative ends. A separate issue concerns lacking a source of moral motivation when empathy replaces our first-personal stance with the perspective of the other person.<sup>17</sup> We may do better for other people by remaining in our own footwear and, perhaps by anger or a sense of injustice, acting on their behalf when precepts to which we are committed are infringed. Another problem again is that empathy's reliance on capturing feelings makes it a poor motivator for moral action when we are separated by distance from those in need. The philosopher Jesse Prinz has discussed a study demonstrating that while people are often willing to help people suffering directly in front of them, a far smaller proportion cross the street to give the same assistance. The psychologist Paul Bloom believes that empathy is a sacred cow whose time has come for the slaughterhouse, making way for a 'rational compassion' capable of extending human goodwill beyond the narrow preferences determined by immediate impulses.<sup>18</sup>

These criticisms hold true for historical understanding. If empathy cannot motivate us to cross a street, how can it inspire us to journey into a past full of characters who take work to understand? The need in history to attribute a context to past actions renders inadequate its formulation as feeling for people who lived in the past, for such a conception is silent on what

constitutes a historical context and what is required for identifying it. History requires a commitment to distant peoples and places that feeling alone cannot sustain. The historian must be animated by a sense of importance and relevance reaching beyond the merely immediate. A history of empathy's place in historical thinking shows that it offered a means for treating the past by its own standards and 'in its own terms', when 'in' refers to the attempt by historians to describe a past phenomenon in terms of its own internal elements and categories rather than from the standpoint of any existing scheme – what social scientists and in particular anthropologists call emic and etic perspectives. Empathy penetrated a context said to yield a variety of historical understanding proper to the newly formed history discipline. The purpose of this book is to specify and evaluate the precise nature of that context.

*Historically speaking*, I argue that the rise of psychology, as well as the shift from metaphysics to epistemology in philosophical reflection upon history, created a space for empathy to offer itself to historical method. From the 1960s in history education, the epistemology or 'forms of knowledge' of the discipline were translated into a pedagogy for the school subject. Empathy was launched as the cornerstone of a particularly historical way of knowing that could help insulate the subject from cross-curricular and integrated approaches. Similarly, in nineteenth-century German historicism and neo-Kantianism, the need to secure for history an epistemological foundation was the context in which empathy became a core element in an effort to shore up the legitimacy of historical thinking and knowledge.

The two main thinkers investigated in this book – R.G. Collingwood and H.-G. Gadamer – were deeply dissatisfied with the individualizing psychologism of this nineteenth-century, epistemologically preoccupied tradition. I share with them this dissatisfaction.

*Methodologically speaking*, I argue that the individual-to-individual view of empathy found in the educational literature, as well as in interpretations of Collingwood's doctrine of re-enactment, neglects the fact that language is shared and that, consequently, the historical context empathy must uncover is that which gave rise to common forms of life in the past. By drawing attention away from epistemology and towards metaphysics, I attempt to illuminate the object or subject matter that the empathetic inquirer identifies and describes. To focus on the processes of knowing is the work of the epistemologist; to concentrate on what is being known is the work of the metaphysician. With Collingwood, I agree that we should not separate 'the study of knowing from the study of what is known'.<sup>19</sup>

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This book is a historical investigation into the nature of the historical context that empathetic understanding should attempt to recover. History educa-

tionalists have stressed that empathy cultivates an enriched understanding of historical context. But what context? Does understanding the historical context involve grasping the beliefs, values and goals that people held in the past to help us explain why they acted in the ways they did? Or is the context to be understood that in which it was *possible* for people in the past to hold their beliefs as true and to act upon them accordingly? Is it the beliefs themselves, or the conditions under which they were held, that constitutes the ‘context’ of empathetic understanding?

The conjunction of Collingwood and Gadamer on the importance of the logic of question and answer illuminates, I believe, the historical context that empathetic understanding should attempt to identify and describe. I treat the actions that furnish history with its subject matter as *answers to questions* that arise from *problem contexts* specific to their time and place.

Intellectual historians have recognized that their answer to this question on the nature of the historical context determines in large part the kind of history they write. Over the past two decades, Mark Bevir has defended the historicist and hermeneutic notion that human societies generate meanings that exist at a certain time and place, and that explanations of human meaning must therefore be historical. According to him, ‘all historical meanings must derive from hermeneutic meanings since hermeneutic meanings alone have a temporal existence . . . The hermeneutic meaning of a work derives from the intentions of the person for whom the text has that meaning’.<sup>20</sup> Bevir’s ‘postfoundational intentionalism’ holds that although historians do not have a pure or unmediated access to the past (because all experience and reasoning is theory-laden), they are nevertheless able to postulate the existence of a historical object beyond the texts they study in which this meaning is inscribed – past agents’ intentional states. ‘All meanings arise from the intentional states, notably the beliefs, which individuals attach to texts.’<sup>21</sup> These beliefs are not present in the texts themselves; they are objects historians postulate as those that best make sense of the text. Historians who study *Leviathan* assume, for instance, Hobbes had beliefs he tried to convey in it, and they ascribe to him the beliefs that best make sense of the facts on which they agree.

*Pace* Bevir, Quentin Skinner has voiced concern that this project of recovering beliefs has given the intellectual historian a misleading and impoverished hermeneutic, by which he means that it falsely identifies the object of historical interpretation and constricts from the outset the grounds on which a historical explanation may be offered. The authors of the political and philosophical treatises that intellectual historians generally study were not simply affirming beliefs; they were intervening in and making a contribution to a pre-existing debate or conversation specific to the time and culture in which they were writing. ‘The essential question which we therefore confront, in

studying any given text, is what its author, in writing at the time he did write for the audience he intended to address, could in practice have been intending to communicate by the utterance of this given utterance.<sup>22</sup> Machiavelli did more than merely affirm that force and fraud are indispensable to political success. He launched his contention into a moral and political context that still held to Cicero's humanist account of the *virtus* that brings princely glory. He reminded his readers of Cicero's claim, questioned its authority, satirized it, and thereby opposed and redefined a standard tenet of humanist political theory.<sup>23</sup>

When historians do describe beliefs, a separate problem is that they often begin by asserting whether a belief is true or false before offering an explanation as to why it was held that way. When it is found that a people in the past held a false belief – as, for example, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's peasants of Languedoc believed it was possible to bring harm to others by casting spells on them – the task historians set themselves becomes an inquiry into the causes of a failure of reasoning. They foreclose from the beginning the possibility that the belief may have stemmed from or been held according to a perfectly rational chain of reasoning.<sup>24</sup> Like Bevir's form of intentionalism, Skinner's concept of 'contextualism' posits an object beyond the text to be understood, but rather than the beliefs themselves, it is the preceding or anterior context that gave rise to them, in which they were held and acted upon, that offers historians a richer pasture for explaining human actions in the past.

Empathy enters this discussion when the intentionalist position appears to entail the recovery of past mental states. Skinner has been at pains to distance himself from the theory of mind of the German *Verstehen* school, Collingwood's concept of re-enacting past thought and what he summarizes as 'the discredited hermeneutic ambition of stepping empathetically into other people's shoes'.<sup>25</sup> Bevir accepts a 'weak' account of empathy, reminding historians that they should not emulate natural scientists in searching for causal laws of events, but rejects a 'strong' account that historians should re-enact the mental processes of those they try to understand, on the grounds that it offers them no access to their subjects' pre-conscious and unconscious beliefs, and leaves them unable to transcend the limits their subjects gave to their own work.<sup>26</sup> He cites the followers of Gadamer's ontological hermeneutics and Paul Ricœur's critical hermeneutics as examples of a 'phenomenological scepticism' that highlights the corrupting role subjective prejudices and biases play in any attempt to recover past intentions.<sup>27</sup> Despite our susceptibility to such a theoretical or 'folk-psychological' knowledge, Karsten Stueber has defended 'reenactive empathy' as the default method for gaining knowledge of other persons in the social sciences. By re-enacting and imitating in our own mind the thought processes of other people's behaviour, we can conceive of it as the behaviour of rational agents who act for reasons.<sup>28</sup>

My argument that Collingwood and Gadamer offer a better alternative to empathy makes this study in part an intellectual history of two philosophers' thought. Collingwood scholars debate the extent to which re-enactment, the logic of question and answer, and the theory of absolute and relative presuppositions combine to constitute a coherent philosophical outlook. As Dray and W.J. van der Dussen remark, 'partly because he worked quickly and partly because he did not mind "thinking on paper", his ideas sometimes appear to change significantly over time, and in some cases over a very short time'.<sup>29</sup> Collingwood's best-known work among historians, *The Idea of History*, was not his definitive view on the philosophy of history, but rather a collection of manuscripts and lecture notes written mostly in the mid-1930s and compiled posthumously by his student, T.M. Knox. Gadamer read the book and found in its account of re-enactment the legacy of a naïve historicist epistemology of re-cognition and reconstruction that forgot all new understanding is an integration into something already understood. In *An Autobiography*, on the other hand, Collingwood's account of treating propositions as answers to questions was enough for Gadamer to declare question-and-answer logic the hermeneutical *Urphänomen* or highest principle. That a historical text is made the object of interpretation, both men agreed, means that it puts a question to the interpreter in relation to which the text must be understood.

Gadamer's negative reception of re-enactment followed from his view that the meaning of a text is never reducible to the intentions its author had in producing it. He repudiated the empathy-dependent hermeneutics from which the intentionalist approach to historical interpretation emerged and attempted to supplant it with an ontological hermeneutics recognizing the embedded nature of all understanding. He welcomed the logic of question and answer, on the other hand, because with Collingwood he agreed that to understand a text is to be conducted by its subject matter, which despite being constantly reinterpreted in the dialectical movement of understanding was viewed as residing in a past horizon of meaning separate from the present horizon in which we seek its integration. While Gadamer is often invoked by antifoundationalists to support the claim that there can be no understanding of the past unmediated by present-day concerns and interests, I argue that an underappreciated aspect of his hermeneutics retains historicism's concern with being directed by the distinct questions and meanings the past puts to us. The 'horizon of the question' by which interpreters are conducted when they read a historical text posits an object beyond the text to which it owes its meaning and is thus the source for its understanding. I defend the historicist principle that the meaning of an object resides in its past while allowing for the fact that the interpretation of this meaning always occurs against the backdrop of tradition and prior understanding. By bringing to bear a wider

selection of Collingwood's works and theories on Gadamer's interpretation of him, I suggest that the context of the question to which actions were answers yields the subject matter that historians reconstruct.

In an educational culture obsessed with critical thinking, where to be critical and to detect bias sets the investigator from the start, I take Collingwood and Gadamer to be providing the opportunity for an investigation into what it means to be ready to learn from the past, to be directed by its questions and meanings. I do not have in mind a generic 'openness' to the views and experiences of all and sundry. This can all too easily be taken to license an unreflective relativism that equates taking a position on something with pointing out its truth relativity in time, place and culture. Such an openness is in fact indifferent to the past because it believes itself to have landed upon its kernel of truth, which confined to its past context induces no need to reflect upon its possible shared relevance to today.

I have in mind a historical comportment, a structure of readiness to consider the past as a place that might provide us with considerable insight, if only we grant it the capacity to do so. I am suspicious of approaches that study history for a predetermined end – history for environmentalism, history for national solidarity, history for multiculturalism, and others of varied political colourations – because I see in them the potential for history to be used as a vehicle for buttressing present-day orthodoxies and ways of thinking. The so-called lessons we take from history should emerge from history itself, from a preparedness to treat the historical subject matter as a potential beacon into some important element of our lives. There is an element of risk in letting the past assert itself against the present that we may not like what it says, but nothing I propose suggests blind acceptance. My purpose is to clarify how past questions and meanings interplay with our questions and meanings in historical investigation. While I speak of letting the past assert itself against the present, I do not pretend that there is any such thing as a pure or unmediated access to it.

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'To an analytically minded philosopher', wrote Kant's most recent biographer, 'the biography of a thinker is simply irrelevant, since it says nothing about the truth of his position and adds nothing to the soundness of his arguments.'<sup>30</sup> In providing an educational history of the concept of empathy as well as an intellectual history of its place in the history discipline and in the conjunction of Collingwood and Gadamer's thought, I have had to strike a balance between diachronic description and synchronic analysis. That is, I have had to represent ideas as they were in their specific historical contexts and as they are for the person who continues to think about them. The discussion has to track back and forth between the historical and the analytical.

With my ambition being primarily to historicize the concept of empathy and the currents of thought surrounding it, I adopt the past tense in cases where the continued relevance of the idea might seem to call for the present tense. It is to be held in mind in such instances that I am interested in what the ideas signified rather than whether they are true or false. Of course, the history of ideas is very much the story of individuals and groups responding to ideas they found to be true or false; thus, to state my purpose in terms of signification over truth and falsity does not release me from the duty of inquiring into the validity of the ideas put forward in specific historical contexts. I shift to the present tense in cases where they have been adequately contextualized that they can be treated in this manner.

Added to these considerations about satisfying the expectations of historians and philosophers is the fact that this book investigates a concept used in historical teaching and learning. The history educationalists to whom I refer work in a field geared principally towards the delivery of a professional degree to students training to be school teachers. A good part of this training consists in becoming experienced with the range of models, taxonomies and matrices of historical thinking and historical consciousness that fill the present-day teacher's repertory. I have not sought to add to this toolkit, but rather to sharpen an implement already in it. I hope by this twin account of empathy's educational and intellectual history to clarify for teachers and history education researchers the nature and function of a concept said to be so central to historical inquiry in its varied configurations of pedagogical execution. They should find resources for overcoming longstanding debates on such topics as skills versus content, as well as a matrix for further research on teaching and learning the historical context that should constitute the object of empathetic understanding in history.

Finally, let me be clear that by taking examples from intellectual historians, hermeneutists and philosophers of history, I am not proposing that school students should be studying the texts by Plato or Machiavelli that these thinkers invoke to argue their point. It need only be recalled when these examples arise that empathy in the history classroom is about offering an enriched context of historical understanding, and it is specifying the nature of this context that is our concern. I take the examples to illustrate the historical context that ought to constitute the object of empathetic understanding. This is the preceding or anterior context in which it was possible for historical agents to hold their beliefs as true and to act upon them accordingly.

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This dual exploration of empathy's educational and intellectual history is composed of three parts and ten chapters. Part I (Chapters 1–3) concentrates on the period in which empathy entered UK history education from

the 1950s to the 1970s. Chapter 1 sets this entry against the backdrop of a newfound methodological and theoretical ecumenicism in academic historical practice. History educationalists became interested in distilling the disciplinary essence of the school subject precisely at a time when a proliferation of approaches was blurring the notion of such a clear-cut identity. Chapter 2 explains how the search to establish history's conceptual structure led educationalists to works by philosophers of history attentive to the *sui generis* character of historical knowledge, charting the emergence of a Collingwood-inspired concept of empathy in the Schools Council History Project (SCHP) at the University of Leeds and a rival conception of rational understanding derived from analytical texts at the University of London. Chapter 3 describes how the need for an agreed vocabulary saw empathy win out over its rivals. By drawing on literature emphasizing empathy's hermeneutical character, the preparation is made for a transition to empathy's intellectual history in the middle part of the book.

Part II (Chapters 4–8) is strictly an intellectual history of empathy in German historicism, Collingwood's philosophy of history and Gadamer's hermeneutics. Chapter 4 examines empathy's deployment together with the need in nineteenth-century Germany to offer a historical account of the nation's distinct cultural past. An eighteenth-century revolt against the universalizing pretensions of the French Enlightenment created the conditions for a German historical practice concerned with establishing individual identities. Chapter 5 explores the contributions of nineteenth-century thinkers who sought to secure for history a role in human knowledge by furnishing this empathy-dependent method with a theoretical foundation. Chapter 6 shifts attention fully to Collingwood to contrast the individualizing psychologism of the German historicists with an Italian outlook that proved far more influential in his attempt to reconcile history and philosophy, epistemology and metaphysics. Chapter 7 attends to the claim that re-enactment belongs to a primitive empathetic hermeneutics by examining the doctrine alongside Collingwood's twin theories of question-and-answer and absolute presuppositions. I put forward the case that these two theories illuminate the historical context with which empathetic understanding ought to concern itself. Chapter 8 extends Collingwood's contribution to specifying this context by linking it with what Gadamer termed the dialectic of question and answer. Both men responded to the psychologism of the nineteenth-century empathy tradition in a way that Gadamer did not fully appreciate in receiving Collingwood's thought.

Part III (Chapters 9–10) returns to the educational milieu where Part I left off in the early 1980s. It brings the discussion of empathy's place in history education into the current century while drawing on the themes and patterns presented in Part II. Chapter 9 describes how the philosophical programme

behind empathy's launch in the 1970s played out in the development of a national curriculum for England and Wales in the 1980s. Empathy was ultimately omitted, but this did not spell its end. The concept was one of several disciplinary, structural or second-order concepts that were taken up outside England by history curriculum theorists and designers, most prominently in an influential Canadian model of historical thinking. Chapter 10 explains how this model has combined two traditions of historical thought: first, the analytical tradition that gave rise to disciplinary concepts; and, second, the historicist-hermeneutical tradition through which empathy was theorized alongside the concept of historical consciousness that has come to occupy an important place in contemporary history education research. These two traditions of historical thought now vie for the attention of a global network of history educators.

## Notes

1. Unlike the more generic terms 'history educator' and 'history education researcher', I use the term 'history educationalist' to refer specifically to an academic working from a university department of education, with an interest primarily in historical teaching and learning in a school curricular context.

2. Peter Lee, 'History Teaching and Philosophy of History', *History and Theory* 22, 4 (1983), 40.

3. Compare Peter Lee and Rosalyn Ashby, 'Empathy, Perspective Taking, and Rational Understanding', and Elizabeth Anne Yeager and Stuart J. Foster, 'The Role of Empathy in the Development of Historical Understanding', in O.L. Davis Jr., Elizabeth Anne Yeager and Stuart J. Foster (eds), *Historical Empathy and Perspective Taking in the Social Studies* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 3, 23; Stuart Foster, 'Using Historical Empathy to Excite Students about the Study of History: Can You Empathize with Neville Chamberlain?' *Social Studies* 90, 1 (1999), 18–24.

4. Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 19–21; G.R. Elton, *The Practice of History* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1967), 17, 65, 85; G. Kitson Clark, *The Critical Historian* (London: Heinemann, 1967), 135.

5. Peter Gay, *Style in History* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 215.

6. C.G. Hempel, 'The Function of General Laws in History', *Journal of Philosophy* 39, 2 (1942), 44–45; reprinted to wider circulation in Patrick Gardiner (ed.), *Theories of History: Readings from Classical and Contemporary Sources* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1959), 344–56.

7. William Dray, *Laws and Explanation in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), 120.

8. *Ibid.*, 129.

9. Kerwin Lee Klein, *From History to Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 49–51.

10. William Dray, 'The Historical Explanation of Actions Reconsidered', in Sidney Hook (ed.), *Philosophy and History: A Symposium* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), 133.

11. Except where they appear differently in direct quotations and in other writers' usage, I hyphenate 're-think' and 're-enact', as Collingwood did, to retain their sense as technical terms in his philosophy of history.

12. Bridget Cooper, *Empathy in Education: Engagement, Values and Achievement* (London: Continuum, 2011), 7–8; Arnold P. Goldstein and Gerald Y. Michaels, *Empathy: Development, Training, and Consequences* (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1985), 1–5; Nancy Eisenberg and Janet Strayer (eds), *Empathy and its Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), ix; Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie (eds), *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

13. ‘Obama to Graduates: Cultivate Empathy: “The World Doesn’t Just Revolve around You”’, Northwestern University Commencement Speech, 19 June 2006. As President, Obama continued to spread his empathy message in commencement speeches across the country.

14. I have changed ‘empathic’ to ‘empathetic’ in the few instances where authors use the former. While the shorter form is indeed the original, *empathetic* has prevailed as the preferred adjective in all but certain styles of scientific, modern self-help and spiritual writing.

15. Keith C. Barton and Linda S. Levstik, *Teaching History for the Common Good* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004), 207; Christopher Blake, ‘Historical Empathy: A Response to Foster and Yeager’, *International Journal of Social Education* 13, 1 (1998), 26; Jason L. Endacott, ‘Reconsidering Affective Engagement in Historical Empathy’, *Theory and Research in Social Education* 38, 1 (2010), 8; Deborah L. Cunningham, ‘Understanding Pedagogical Reasoning in History Teaching through the Case of Cultivating Historical Empathy’, *Theory and Research in Social Education* 35, 4 (2007), 592–630. See also Sarah Brooks, ‘Historical Empathy in the Social Studies Classroom: A Review of the Literature’, *Journal of Social Studies Research* 33, 2 (2009), 213–34.

16. ‘Tuning the History Discipline in the United States’, *American Historical Association*. Retrieved 23 November 2017 from <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/tuning-the-history-discipline>.

17. Fritz Breithaupt, ‘Empathy for Empathy’s Sake: Aesthetics and Everyday Empathic Sadism’, in Aleida Assmann and Ines Detmers (eds), *Empathy and its Limits* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 162; Jesse J. Prinz, ‘Is Empathy Necessary for Morality?’ and Peter Goldie, ‘Anti-empathy’, in Coplan and Goldie (eds), *Empathy*, 211–29 and 302–17 respectively.

18. Prinz, ‘Is Empathy Necessary for Morality?’ 220; see also by the same author, ‘Against Empathy’, *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 49, 1 (2011), 214–33; Paul Bloom, *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016).

19. R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, rev. edn [1946] Jan van der Dussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3.

20. Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 76; see also Mark Bevir, ‘In Defence of Historicism’, *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 6, 1 (2012), 111–14.

21. Mark Bevir, ‘How to Be an Intentionalist’, *History and Theory* 41, 2 (2002), 213.

22. Quentin Skinner, ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’, *History and Theory* 8, 1 (1969), 48–49.

23. Quentin Skinner, ‘Belief, Truth and Interpretation’, Keynote Address, Intellectual History: Traditions and Perspectives, Ruhr Universität Bochum, 18 November 2014.

24. Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics, Volume 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 35–36.

25. *Ibid.*, 120.

26. Bevir, *Logic*, 157–58.

27. *Ibid.*, 76–77, 121, 123–24.

28. Karsten Stueber, *Rediscovering Empathy: Agency, Folk Psychology, and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

29. W.H. Dray and W.J. van der Dussen, editors’ introduction to *The Principles of History: And Other Writings in Philosophy of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), xv. Although unfinished, Collingwood gave Knox permission to publish his manuscript ‘The

Principles of History' as a separate book, which he had hoped would be his final word on the philosophy of history. How Knox edited the manuscript and included it in *The Idea of History* has been a topic of vigorous discussion among Collingwood scholars. The original manuscript was lost until 1995, when it was discovered in the Oxford University Press archive. In 1978, Collingwood's widow deposited several thousand pages of unpublished manuscripts in the New Bodleian Library at Oxford. A new version of *The Idea of History* appeared in 1994, edited by Jan van der Dussen, containing important lectures from 1926 and 1928. I rely particularly on the 1928 'Die manuscript' Collingwood cited in his *Autobiography* as being such a breakthrough in his thought.

30. Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 19.